New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1954

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"The Traveling Lady"

Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of November 1, 1954

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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"The Rainmaker"

New York Post

October 29, 1954

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Romantic Stranger and a Girl

Geraldine Page and N. Richard Nash possess two or three traits in common, which might have meant that, when Miss Page appeared last night at the Cort Theater in Mr. Nash's new play called "The Rainmaker," the result would be electric. It happens, though, that their mutual qualities, while fairly spectacular, are not exclusively happy ones. Both the actress and the playwright have imagination, power and individuality of approach to offer, but they also have a tendency to fall into the temptation of diffuseness, excess of detail and over-elaboration.

It would be a mistake, however, to enlarge too much on any parallel between them, and it may be enough if I express my opinion that Miss Page's performance, while often moving and brilliant, is likewise inclined to be mannered and lacking in simplicity, and that Mr. Nash's romantic comedy, while imaginative and occasionally touching and humorous, wastes its effects by going off into rather elaborate philosophical bypaths that are more annoying than helpful. I could be in the minority in regarding it as at best a worthy and adventurous striving.

Not that this isn't deserving of considerable commendation. It is. When Mr. Nash is telling of the plain girl, whose father and brothers are worried because she can't seem to get a man and who is convinced that she must hide her intelligence if she is ever to win one, and of her brief romance with an imaginative faker, who has splendid dreams and swindles the gullible by making them think he can produce rain, his play can be most promising. In several of its scenes, "The Rainmaker" has a lyric humor of the sort that the theater needs.

But it seems to me that, if his romantic fable is to remain direct and touching, the dramatist should keep it simple and to the point. Instead, he endeavors to take in too much territory by adding to his promising legend the philosophical commentary. He believes, for instance, in faith, and, at one point, he expresses the conviction that the fellow who can believe that black is white is the salt of the earth. It also seems to him that the realist is always in error and that it is better to believe in a fraud than not to have faith at all.

It happens that this reviewer couldn't resist placing himself on the side of the realists, but that is not the point. What disturbed me is, not that I was skeptical about the play's seeming advocacy of uncritical romantic faith, but that, in the course of its advocacy, it grew diffuse and sprawling. Instead of going straight ahead with its simple legend of the rainmaker and the girl, it pauses in its narrative and makes what should have been a charming romantic idyll appear ponderous and heavy-handed.

In her portrayal of the girl, Miss Page leaves no doubt that she is an actress who possesses style and distinction. But I think she suffers a bit from her virtues and has lost something valuable in the way of simplicity and directness. Darren McGavin's fraudulent but pure-at-heart rainmaker combines the proper dash and humor, and Richard Coogan, as a bruised young man afraid of romance, is effectively forthright. There are helpful portrayals by Joseph Sullivan as the realistic brother of the girl, Albert Salmi as the one who isn't realistic, and Cameron Prud'homme as the father. But I thought "The Rainmaker" got out of hand.

"THE RAINMAKER"

Play by N. Richard Nash; staged by Joseph Anthony; setting and lighting by Ralph Alswang; costumes by Bolasni; presented by Ethel Linder Reiner in association with Hope Abelson at the Cort Theatre, October 28, 1954. The cast:

H. C. Curry.....Cameron Prud'homme
Noah Curry.....Joseph Sullivan
Jim Curry.....Albert Salmi
Lizzie Curry....Geraldine Page
File.....Richard Coogan
Sheriff Thomas.....Tom Flatley Reynolds
Bill Starbuck...Darren McGavin

The New York Times

October 29, 1954

Theatre in Review: Mating Time

'Rainmaker' Arrives at the Cort Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THANKS largely to Geraldine Page and an excellent cast, "The Rainmaker," acted at the Cort last evening, turns out to be an enjoyable romantic comedy. It is the work of N. Richard Nash, who was in a portentous mood last year with a cosmic piece entitled "See the Jaguar."

This year he has nothing in mind except an evening of laughter and perhaps a valuable movie scenario for the future. Last year it was a TV script. "The Rainmaker" is set during a drought in some western state, probably a quarter of a century ago. It concerns the stumbling attempts H. C. Curry and the two Curry boys make to marry off the Curry girl.

She is an honest girl who terrifies the men by her intelligence. Gradually she accepts the fact that she has spinster's blood in her veins. But the swashbuckling confidence man who professes to be a rainmaker persuades her to think of herself as beautiful. Before the play is over he and the deputy sheriff are competing for her hand.

The romantic sequences of "The Rainmaker" are a little sticky. Mr. Nash writes them as though he were selling a bill of goods. The ideas are mawkish; the style is ornate and the effect is a little debilitating to lovers of the true and the beautiful.

But this may be because the comedy premises of "The Rainmaker" are so fresh and funny. It is a Western without shooting and Mr. Nash's breezy sketches of the bumbling locals are uproarious. For Westerns are a fabulous convention in which all sorts of gaucheries and simplicities have values of their own. What might be hackneyed in an Eastern is pungent against the background of the West.

As a comedienne, Miss Page has some unexpected qualities. She is fresher than the play and equally funny. Looking mighty purty in dungarees that are enraptured by her long legs, she creates a saucy, spontaneous character who slides lazily through the comedy scenes, tossing off any number of quizzical ideas. Mr. Nash's humors probably do not have as much originality as her acting. A good listener as well as a fine protagonist, she improvises a genuine character out of the things Mr. Nash has provided.

Her romantic scenes don't have quite so much distinction. There seems to be too much detail in them. There are some contrived attitudes. The character she is playing begins to look like a laboratory study of romantic acting, and the buoyancy of the comic scenes begins to disappear. But when the script permits her to be free and easy without being self-conscious, Miss Page is, in her quiet way, hilarious.

Under the expert direction of Joseph Anthony, who has a genial sense of humor, the entire performance is very lively. Cameron Prud'homme as a worried though sympathetic father; Joseph Sullivan as a priggish brother; Richard Coogan as a sheepish man of the law with romantic sensibilities; Tom Flatley Reynolds as the standard sheriff—give racy performances.

Albert Salmi's coltish brother is a little better than that. Awkward, restless, rebellious, it is a vastly amusing folk character out of a country dance. And Darren McGavin's braggart rainmaker, composed of purple patches and convivial grandiloquence, is excellent theatre also. In his single setting of an open-topped ranch house on a prairie, Ralph Alswang has provided a flexible and inviting environment for Mr. Nash's tall tale.

On the whole, it is a lusty antic in a popular comedy vein. The romantic interludes will do no one any permanent harm.

Daily Mirror

October 29, 1954

'The Rainmaker' Heading For $ $ Downpour

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Imagination and excitement returned to the theatre Thursday evening via "The Rainmaker." N. Richard Nash has been knocking at the door of success for quite a spell. now it has opened to him. And Broadway will be the happier and richer for it. So will his producers, Ethel Linder Reiner and Hope Abelson.

* * *

IF THE MATERIALS that have gone into "The Rainmaker" be not entirely original, author Nash has blended them with admirable skill, insight into the human heart and the touch of a poet. Veterans will recall flashes of "The Miracle Man," "The Servant in the House" and "Cinderella." So what? They were all good theatre, too.

Nash tells a tale of a moon-struck faker who comes to a drought-ridden farm, promising to bring rain for $100. This, to his delight and surprise, he eventually does. But not before he has convinced a girl destined for spinsterhood that she can be beautiful if she wills it, a dull boy that he can be bright and a dour deputy sheriff that marriage has its points.

"The Rainmaker" is the kind of play that calls for artful direction and casting. And these it has gotten. Joseph Anthony, who must like the script as much as we do, has staged it with welcome robustiousness and affection. Which is all to the good. For, in our opinion, vitality is an asset too long scorned by those sophisticates scared of decent sentiment and genuine emotion.

* * *

DARREN McGAVIN gives a magnificent bravura performance in the title role. His star-gazing, swash-buckling glib-talking humbug is an arresting and lovable fellow, indeed. Unlike so many moderns, he's not afraid to dream. It is good to know that we have young players capable of acting in the grand manner.

Geraldine Page, in a less showy, contrasting style, is tremendously moving as the inhibited girl who is too honest to be a coquette, and knows she is making a fool of herself when she tries. The audience broke into spontaneous applause when she finally chose to mix reality and dreams in the right proportion.

Albert Salmi, a wizard at portraying dumb but likable characters, has a field day this time out. Cameron Prud'homme is outstanding as a kindly farmer who knows the value of faith, and is willing to subsidize its dedicated and even dubious advocates. And there are excellent contributions by Joseph Sullivan, Richard Coogan and Tom Flatley Reynolds.

* * *

RALPH ALSWANG has designed an atmospheric setting that obviates lulls in the action. It drew palm pats even before the players had started to speak.

"The Rainmaker" should bring golden showers to the Cort Theatre box office for quite a spell. With it and "The Tender Trap", ensconced in W. 48th St., there should be no drought at the turnstiles in that vicinity. In fact, producers, ticket specs and our friend Patsy at the Vesuvio should be reaping some abundant and profitable harvests.

In our book, "The Rainmaker" is a stimulating and rewarding experience in play-going. It puts theatre back into the theatre. This is a hit you must see.

New York World-Telegram and The ~~Evening~~ Sun

October 29, 1954

'Rainmaker' Rates as a Hit Out of the Blue

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

This is a cloudburst of a hit, this "Rainmaker."

Here is Cinderella in a drought on a ranch, ending up with two princes and a thunderstorm.

Geraldine Page really spread her wings at the Cort last night. She has been billed as a star before. Now she declares that stardom irrevocably.

It may well be that "The Rainmaker" will be for Miss Page what "Peg o' My Heart" was for Laurette Taylor. If the public gets its way, the new comedy probably will run as long.

Audience Is Hers.

From the start the star holds the hearts of the audience in the palm of her pretty little hand. Miss Page plays Lizzie Curry, a gawky damsel with a good heart unconvinced of her own marriageability. Her two brothers and her father are at the end of their lassos when they ask the young deputy to dinner and get turned down.

Then along comes the Rainmaker. He is a lusty nut, a dreamer and a wanderer, who wants to be a miracle man. But he does one wonderful thing for Lizzie. He teaches her to dream out loud.

Lizzie is shrewder than he is. She lets her hair down, and begins to think lovely things. But she keeps her dreams on the ground where she can get at them.

It has always been hopeless to describe Geraldine Page to anyone who has never seen her. It is an elusive style that bores to your heart.

Infinite Charm.

Most exciting about her performance here is the sudden spread of range. Her comedy has the abandon of a Mary Martin, and that is saying something. She has always been affecting, but she has never before had the charm which is suddenly infinite in her acting.

You cannot forget the long, silent but very active moment when she accepts the refusal of a man to dine with her. The second act has her enchanting satire of the "silly girls" of the town, as she pretends to woo her father. In the third, her miracle of becoming beautiful is only topped by her moment of embarrassment of riches at the end.

Richard Nash writes of fresh, virile, positive people, whose conflicts are open, tough and honest. His play moves smoothly through several simultaneous sets, under expert lighting by Ralph Alswang.

Excellent Cast.

And he is fortunate in the cast. Albert Salmi, who played that hair-raising drunk scene in "End as a Man," is the brother who is ornery and thick, but not dumb. In his way he has the same wonderful reality that Miss Page sheds. Every move he makes concerns you deeply, while it makes you roar with friendly laughter.

Cameron Prud'homme is the wise father, lusty but modest, and Joseph Sullivan is the very human older brother, humorless and earnest, who wants to run the family like cattle.

Darren McGavin has a song-like quality for the would-be miracle man of the title, a wild but sensitive fellow, and Richard Coogan makes a handsome stubborn beau.

DAILY NEWS

October 29, 1954

Miss Page Is Charming and Funny In 'Rainmaker,' a Nice Romance

By JOHN CHAPMAN

This has been Ladies' Week in the theatre. First it was Kim Stanley giving a glowing performance in Horton Foote's folksy folk drama, "The Traveling Lady"; and next it was Geraldine Page giving a delightful performance in N. Richard Nash's folksy romantic comedy, "The Rainmaker," which opened last evening at the 48th St. Theatre.

Some of Miss Page's great admirers, including me, had begun to fear that she was doomed by typecasting to keep on playing rather miserable and terribly wispy heroines and to keep on letting her voice trail away into nothing just when she ought to be saying something. So, last evening, I was greatly cheered to find her a fetching comedienne.

Miss Page plays a Cinderella of the Dust Bowl in an amusing and interesting, if somewhat obvious, theatre piece. Playwright Nash, who got himself all tangled up in poetic symbolism in a mountain drama called "See the Jaguar," has untangled himself considerably. In "The Rainmaker" he presents a forthright and pleasant piece of fiction about a con man who cons a man-hungry ranch girl into really believing she is beautiful.

An Amiable Fable

This is a frankly manufactured tale, but it is fun. Its locale is vaguely indicated as "a western state" in the program, for Nash seems to be oddly cagey about being pinned down to a spot on the map. But his scene designer, Ralph Alswang, is a little more specific; he has devised a cheerful adobe ranch house, which might be down in New Mexico or over in Arizona.

Anyhow, wherever the place is, there has been a terrible drout; the livestock is dying off and the temperature gets down to 104 at night. Miss Page, well on the way to being an old maid, lives on the ranch with her hearty, easygoing father and a couple of brothers. One of the brothers is prissy and a worrier; the other is just a big dumb lug of a kid.

Along comes this fellow who calls himself a rainmaker, a picaresque and picturesque individual who guarantees to bring on a rainstorm for $100. His equipment includes a crooked stick, a big drum and some magical white paint—but, he warns, he must also have some collaboration from the family; they must have a little belief in him and in his trick.

Albert Salmi Scores

The real miracle that he does pull off is not a storm, but making a warm and attractive woman out of a drab, discouraged spinster. Darren McGavin is excellent as he plays the rainmaker with the dash and bravado of a modern medicine man. Miss Page has two wonderfully funny scenes, one as she demonstrates to her father how she plans to seduce a man, and the other when she tries her clumsy wiles on the rainmaker. This is first-rate comic acting.

There are other good performances by Cameron Prud'homme as the father, Joseph Sullivan as the persnickety brother and Richard Coogan as a woman-shy deputy sheriff. And then there is Albert Salmi as the big, dumb kid brother. Right at this moment Mr. Salmi is my favorite comedian. He looks stupid, he acts stupid—and as an actor he is sharp as a tack. He should go far in his trade.

Joseph Anthony has directed the play briskly, thank goodness. Hardly any directors think of being brisk any more.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

October 29, 1954

THEATER

'The Rainmaker'

By WALTER F. KERR

Painting the Clouds

"ONCE in your life you've gotta take a chance on a con-man," remarks one of the rambunctious farmers early in "The Rainmaker." Author N. Richard Nash may be a bit of a con-man—he's spinning cotton-candy rainbows all over the Cort—but I think you've got to take a chance on him.

What Mr. Nash is writing is a sentimental romantic comedy. Sentiment has been out of date for quite awhile, and romance hasn't exactly been sweeping the town, either. In fact, there are quite a few times when the honeysuckle plotting of "The Rainmaker" looks like something that might have opened the old Empire.

• • •

The flamboyant blue-shirted hero, with his boots brightly polished and his hair curling down his neck, makes an entrance by rapping loudly at a farmhouse door, dodging gaily out of sight, and then, when the door has been opened by a puzzled family, whipping bouyantly in out of the sun-drenched West. Visions of Otis Skinner and Holbrook Blinn are apt to float like sugar-plums through your head.

When I add that this rollicking fellow carries a big bass drum with which he promises to cure a drought, that he convinces a plain girl she is a princess by tenderly placing an old tin funnel on her head, that he winds up kissing the hem of her dress and gently unpinning her hair, you'll know that the word "romantic" is not used lightly.

• • •

What is most fantastic about Mr. Nash's bolt of moonshine, though, is that an impressive amount of it strikes home. This is partly due to a slightly skeptical grin that author and characters persist in keeping on their faces. Nobody believes in the rainmaker. Nobody pretends that the girl of the house is really pretty. Nobody strives to kid the audience into anything they're not ready to believe on their own. As a result, a lot of long-standing guards go quickly down; there's room for jubilant nonsense, and moonlit sadness, to slip through. Mr. Nash has the humor and the good-humor to keep disbelief at a pleasant distance.

• • •

The rest of the old-fashioned spell comes from the playing, especially from the no-holds-barred playing of Geraldine Page. Miss Page lopes into the Curry kitchen in shirt and jeans, lugs her bachelor brothers bossily about the room, stamps her feet stubbornly as they talk about hog-tieing a prospective husband for her. Confronted with an embarrassed fellow she really likes, she swivels her jaw in dismay at her tactical errors, blows the hair from her face in frantic frustration, all but hauls off at him in her anger at herself.

Someone has had the courage to believe that Miss Page, the champion young tear-jerker of our time, can do comedy. And she can. There is an animated sequence in which the actress furiously mimics all the girls who are successful in love, wrapping herself in a handy quilt and kicking one shoe to the top of the barn, that is delectable improvisation. There are one or two others, it must be said, in which Miss Page is pushed into open farce, and this is perhaps the one hold that ought to be barred from now on.

• • •

In any event, the star's performance is funny, touching, and unabashedly heart-warming. Darren McGavin, as the boisterous magician who wants "things to be as pretty when I get 'em as they are when I'm thinking about 'em," manages a barrelful of rococo flourishes with abandon. Richard Coogan, as the deputy sheriff of a plain girl's dreams, is strong, silent and engagingly sensible. Albert Salmi has a field day for himself as a loutish but affectionate bonehead of a brother, and Joseph Sullivan and Cameron Prud'homme round out the family stoutly.

Joseph Anthony has directed a bustling performance in which lines tumble after one another in familiar domestic chaos, and Ralph Alswang has made a complex triple-area setting seem roomy and colorful.

Some rolling hills curve backward toward a western sky. Mr. Nash is curving backward, too, toward a theater in which ugly ducklings did turn into swans and rain did fall from the skies in time for the final curtain. If you don't mind the theatrical crinoline—or if you have a sneaking fondness for it—"The Rainmaker" may strike you as a refreshing breeze.

Journal-American

October 29, 1954

Delightful Bit Of Stardust

Geraldine Page Stands Out In a Light, New Comedy

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE Cort Theatre was the setting last night for the successful come-back of Geraldine Page in a delightful bit of fluff and stardust called "The Rainmaker."

After her struggle in "The Immoralist"—a property ill suited to her talents—it is gratifying to see her in a role that gives full scope to her understanding of the emotions of a plain, earthy and rather wistful woman.

Here she is able to display her full repertoire: the fluttery hands, the thin-lipped smile, the clear yet faltering delivery. If at times she seems to be somewhat carried away in her zeal to charm and amuse, it can be forgiven a second later when she returns to the realities of her basic problems.

In the course of the evening she is required to be coy, brash, tender, boisterous, tragic, plaintive and angry—and she manages most of it wonderfully well.

Charming Phony

The play starts out as though it may develop into a "message." A girl and her father and two brothers are living on a farm out West and there is a terrible drought. The lack of rain is bad enough, but the boys seem even more concerned about getting the girl married.

And then, suddenly, there arrives a handsome character who practically breaks the door down and announces that he can produce any kind of rain they want for $100. I had a horrible feeling that this guy might turn out to be a symbol, and it made me very nervous.

But as the play progresses we learn that he is merely a charming phony. If he is a symbol—and I suppose he might be at that—he is the saint who has been sent to bring assurance and warmth to a lonely and insecure young woman.

In any event he gets her to admit she's pretty, and even has her believing it to the point where she traps the village catch. And I hardly need to tell you that as he goes off into the night the thunder begins to roll and the lightning flashes. Amen.

Stand-out Role

This is not exactly great Oklahoma Chekhov, but I don't think it ever pretends to be. It is a mild and pleasant little story with a lot of zip to it, some humorous moments and some quite touching ones.

It has the stand-out performance of Miss Page, alone among all those men, and the spirited support of Cameron Prud'homme, as the faher; Joseph Sullivan, as the level-headed and unrelenting older brother, and Albert Salmi, as the wild and impressoinable kid in he family. Darren McGavin gives an extremely attractive and robust characterization of The Rainmaker.

These are nice people, and the plot moves amiably through the evening, breathing easily and pausing now and then for a small tear and a chuckle.

I think you'll like it.

"The Traveling Lady"

DAILY NEWS

October 28, 1954

'Traveling Lady' Rueful but Slim

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Last season Horton Foote wrote a gentle and rueful playlet, "The Trip to Bountiful," about a sweet li'l ole lady who took a Texas bus to visit her girlhood home and found it a shabby ruin. In it Lillian Gish gave a stunning performance. Now Mr. Foote has written another rueful, gentle playlet about a sweet and brave young mother who takes another Texas bus to meet her ex-con husband and finds that he still is a no-goodnik. This piece, "The Traveling Lady," was produced by the Playwrights' Company at the Playhouse last evening, and its chief blessing is another artful performance by another artful actress, Kim Stanley.

Folksy, All Right

This is a folk play, filled with Texas characters, all of whom look, sound and act authentic under the direction of Vincent J. Donehue. As characters they all are interesting, but the dramatist hasn't given them enough work to do to make a full and satisfying evening of theatregoing. After a while one tires of doing nothing but feel sorry for Miss Stanley because she is so open-hearted and gallant in the face of a dirty deal. One also tires of hearing Miss Brook Seawell, a charming and able little trouper aged 7, ask, "When am I going to see my daddy?"

Has Many Gifts

But Miss Stanley's playing is admirable; she is gifted with perception, resourcefulness and charm. There also are several other good characters, well played, including Mary Perry as a slightly daft old lady whose mind has not yet lost all its sharpness; Katherine Squire as her nagging daughter; Helen Carew as a stoutly sensible Texas lady and Kathleen Comegys as a female who considers it her mission to betray men into the temperance habit.

Lonny Chapman does well by the role of the spineless husband who has been in the pen for six years and can't help drinking and thieving when he gets out. And Jack Lord also does nicely as a young fellow who would like to become young Mlle. Seawell's new daddy. But in the old days of the Palace Theatre and the Orpheum Circuit "The Traveling Lady" would have been done in 20 minutes—and been the better for it.

"THE TRAVELING LADY"

Play by Horton Foote; staged by Vincent J. Donehue; setting, lighting and costumes by Ben Edwards; presented by the Playwrights' Company at the Playhouse Theatre, October 27, 1954. The cast:

Mrs. Mavis.....Mary Perry
Slim Murray.....Jack Lord
Judge Robedaux...Calvin Thomas
Georgette Thomas..Kim Stanley
Margaret Rose....Brook Seawell
Clara Breedlove....Helen Carew
Sitter Mavis...Katherine Squire
Mrs. Tillman..Kathleen Comegys
Henry Thomas..Lonny Chapman
Sheriff.....Tony Sexton

Daily Mirror

October 28, 1954

'The Traveling Lady' Bows At 48th St. Playhouse

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The news from W. 48th St. this morning is that Horton Foote remains "a promising playwright." Foote has a knack of penning scripts that have a goodly measure of merit, a solid role for a star, but don't quite come off. "The Traveling Lady," which the Playwrights' Company brought to the Playhouse Wednesday evening, runs true to formula.

• • •

A COUPLE of seasons ago, "The Chase," which we consider the best of Foote's plays, offered an excellent role for John Hodiak, and last season "The Trip to Bountiful" provided Lillian Gish with an even better one. And Miss Gish worked wonders with it. Now, "The Traveling Lady" has an outstanding part for the Kim Stanley who was a standout in "Picnic."

Miss Stanley is currently impersonating a nice little farm girl who marries a third-rate bandleader with larcenous and murderous instincts. Just before the birth of their daughter, he gets drunk and stabs a man in a brawl. The loyal wife works at odd jobs to support their child and pay a lawyer to get him out of the penitentiary.

Has he learned anything in the pen? Nope. He's still a heel. He doesn't even let his family know about his release on parole. They have to find it out by blundering into a Texas town where he has been exercising his wiles on a couple of elderly ladies. Faced with responsibility, he goes on a toot, swipes a benefactor's belongings and earns another stretch in the pokey.

• • •

BUT THE NICE little wife has met a nice widower, whose late spouse had done him dirt. At the final curtain's fall, they are heading for the orange groves and cotton fields of a flourishing valley. And Foote led us, at least, to believe they are heading for happiness.

Miss Stanley gets more emotion from her role than Foote wrote into it. With unshowy simplicity, she manages to make the betrayed wife a truly touching figure. Her performance should be up for an award or two when they start counting votes next Spring.

Jack Lord is quite effective as the lonely man who befriends the bewildered travelers. Lonny Chapman does all he can for the unsympathetic and unreliable batoneer. Helen Carew plays a good Samaritan with forthright authority. Mary Perry, as a senile gadabout, has the only amusing lines of the evening, and knows what to do with them.

LITTLE BROOK SEAWELL, Tallulah Bankhead's godchild, makes her professional debut as a grave youngster who has to learn some sordid facts at a tender age. Mention is also due Calvin Thomas, Katherine Squire, Kathleen Comegys and Tony Sexton.

Ben Edwards has designed a weatherbeaten house to supply the proper atmosphere, while Vincent J. Donehue has directed the new arrival with less than an inspired hand.

Foote has just about exhausted the dramatic possibilities of frustration in rural Texas in his last three times out. We suggest he take a tip from the title of his latest work, and start traveling. All his scripts have been notable for sincerity and accuracy, but these virtues just haven't added up to completely rewarding theatre.

The New York Times

October 28, 1954

Theatre: Texas Drama

By BROOKS ATKINSON

HORTON FOOTE has written a part in which Kim Stanley gives a glorious performance. In "The Traveling Lady," which opened at The Playhouse last evening, she goes to the head of the class.

She acts a commonplace young married woman of Texas whose husband is a bum. Georgette, as Mr. Foote has named the character, has been pushed out of her home by her father and left to shift for herself and her daughter by her ne'er-do-well husband. Strictly speaking, Georgette is an inarticulate, bewildered drudge who does not appear to be very bright.

But this is where Miss Stanley comes in. She retains the drab facts of the character—the flat vocal tones, the embarrassed hesitation, the awkward posture, the daze and indecision. But by the time Miss Stanley gets through with her, Georgette is a glowing beauty with a valiant spirit and heroic strength. For Miss Stanley has at last come into her own as an actress who can portray not merely a part but a character and illuminate it beautifully from within. This is a stunning piece of acting.

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Mr. Foote is not a forceful playwright. Like "The Trip to Bountiful," in which Lillian Gish gave a memorable performance last year, "The Traveling Lady" is a series of minor characterizations arranged around a major one. It is strung together loosely. It substitutes local color for drama. And, like Georgette, it has trouble in saying anything. Mr. Foote makes a moral point of never making a statement except in extremis. He is the most tight-lipped playwright in the business. The basal metabolism of "The Traveling Lady" is low.

But that does not conclude the subject. For there are some very genuine and very poignant scenes in his play, the result, no doubt, of the decency and humanity of the characters. Even the bum has his points. His impulses are decent enough, but he lacks strength and goes to pieces in the crises. Slim Murray, the man of a family that takes in Georgette and her daughter, is a likable young man with the instincts of a gentleman; and his sister, Clara Breedlove, is a wise and compassionate lady in the best tradition of a small town.

This department is not much interested in the bucolic characters that Mr. Foote introduces for comic effects. They are too glib and facile to count for much in a serious play. Mr. Foote, who is loyal to his small-town background, could probably write them with his eyes closed and perhaps does.

But the major characters are admirable people with some depth of feeling and understanding. In a theatre that is largely populated by decadent people who don't understand anything, it is a pleasure to watch Mr. Foote's characters behave like normal human beings. When they do manage to say something—as, for instance, in the final scene—they are wonderfully honest. The emotional scenes of "The Traveling Lady" are worth the languors that stretch in between.

If the whole performance is beautiful, it must be largely because Mr. Foote has written characters with enough flesh, blood and heart to be actable. Under Vincent J. Donehue's unobtrusive direction, the performance is a lovely one. As scene designer Ben Edwards has provided one of those grubby, artless outdoor porches that are full of sunlight and air. The whole play takes place in this setting.

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All the parts are well acted by a well-selected cast. Mary Perry as a harassed old lady with a wandering mind; Calvin Thomas as a kindly-spoken judge; Katherine Squire as a shrill-voiced neighbor; Kathleen Comegys as a neighbor with the mind of a missionary give valid performances in the subordinate parts.

The major parts are acted superbly. As the hospitable lady of the family, Helen Carew catches the wisdom under the folksy exterior. Jack Lord's man in the house, taciturn in manner, has a fervent sincerity that is overwhelming in the last scene. As the bum, Lonny Chapman skilfully expresses the weak goodwill behind the cheapness of the exterior. As Georgette's little daughter, Brook Seawell is straightforward and adorable.

And, of course, Miss Stanley is magnificent. "The Traveling Lady" is her play.

Journal American

October 28, 1954

Thin Plot Fails To Stretch Out

Kim Stanley Shines, But Play Lacks Suspense and Surprise

By JOHN McCLAIN

KIM STANLEY did her talented best last night to breathe life into a new play by Horton Foote, but on this scorecard it is regrettably recorded as a close but losing decision.

"The Traveling Lady" is the title of the property which the Playwrights' Company presented at the Playhouse Theatre, and once again we are confronted with problem of stretching a thin idea into three acts.

A young mother and her infant daughter arrive in a small Texas town to be on hand when the father is released fromf the penitentiary, having served his time.

There is a nice young mechanic in the neighborhood, too, and when the convict fails to show up on schedule, and the mechanic being so nice and all, it is a surprise to almost nobody that the young mother is attracted to him. In fact, when it is finally revealed that her husband has gotten drunk and committed another crime, following his release, it is no wonder that she decides to go off with the mechanic.

That is very roughly the plot—and nothing wrong with it either—except that it takes so long to tell. There are episodes involving a neighbor's demented mother, a village funeral, and the complex efforts of the kindly folk of the town to shield the wife from her worthless husband.

There is even a rather moving moment when the husband is finally brought in, temporarily relieved of his handcuffs, and permitted to sing an old Texas ballad particularly beloved by his young daughter.

But there is barely a moment after the second scene when we are not all aware of what will eventuate, and there is no element of suspense or surprise in the interim.

I say Kim Stanley nearly made it come off, and this is true, because her performance carries such strength and sympathy that the details of her plight seem nearly unimportant. She is a mother, fighting for survival and the future of her child, and there are many times when it doesn't seem to matter that the whole thing is running relentlessly in the same old direction.

Jack Lord turns in a forseful and engaging effort as the itinerant machinist; Brook Seawell is another of those incredibly able child actresses, playing the part of the daughter; Helen Carew, Mary Perry, and Katherine Squire fill in capably as the ladies of the neighborhood, and Lonny Chapman is a properly depraved and drunken husband.

It all seems such a shame for Miss Stanley—she would be so wonderful in something more worthy of her gifts.

New York Herald Tribune

October 28, 1954

THEATER

'The Traveling Lady'

By WALTER F. KERR

Still Life

IT IS fascinating to watch Kim Stanley as she twists her fidgety fingers, moistens her lips in desperation and stumbles over all the things she'd like to say in Horton Foote's "The Traveling Lady." Miss Stanley is playing a young and deserted mother, left to her own devices in a small town in Texas, who has all kinds of loyalty for her runaway husband but very few brains to help her along.

The actress stammers out an awkward and rattled phrase to introduce herself to some kind-hearted strangers; she beats at her blonde head in exasperation with her own forgetfulness; she stands in dumb dismay as her last forlorn hope of happiness is brutally denied her. Toward the end of the evening she manages, in a few fumbling gestures and some broken sentences, to suggest three sorts of life all at once: the life of the child whose shoe she is buckling, the crude pleasure of her own remembered childhood, the violent and wasted life of the man neither of them will ever see again. The performance brims over with hints of hidden, half-understood, emotion.

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Miss Stanley's invention is brilliant. Unfortunately, it must be if "The Traveling Lady" is to have any theatrical vitality at all. For author Horton Foote has supplied nothing beyond the barest commonplaces by way of conversation, nothing beyond the feeblest Chekhovian flutterings by way of activity.

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The evening opens with an exhaustive view of a weather-beaten front porch. It borders on a cemetery. It houses, for an interminable stretch, a bevy of aging biddies who can remember everything: the storm that destroyed the fig trees in 1922, who is buried where in the lot next door, what has happened to most of the principal characters these ten or twenty years past. There is, it is true, one old lady who cannot quite keep awake or quite recall the names of the other chatterers, and I must say she had my sympathy.

When the tired young visitor descends upon them, discovers her estranged husband, and simultaneously falls in love with a sober fellow who has also been disappointed in love, they keep on talking. For long, long stretches in the second act, the principals disappear altogether so that the neighbors can go on guessing about them. When the mismatched lovers do at last come together for a round of good-byes, they turn out to be the only people for miles around who are hopelessly tongue-tied.

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It seems to me that Mr. Foote has played two dirty tricks on language. He has written ordinary speech in an ordinary way. And when his lovers are deeply moved, moved perhaps beyond the confines of ordinary speech, he is speechless. The author has, in a way, been true to life; but he has also been unforgivably dull.

Several of the supporting players do what they can to help Miss Stanley breathe fire into unfinished phrases. Jack Lord, as the local boy who is drawn to the wandering girl, sits on a gnarled country-chair, locks his fingers together and slowly, step by step, builds a vivid picture of his frustrated past with an unloving wife. But he cannot find an emotional top for the scene, no matter how hard he tries; the language will not be budged.

Helen Carew speaks sharply and sensibly the level-headed lines that are given her, and Brook Seawell is always appealing as a pale, shy child with shrewd and dubious eyes. Lonny Chapman shuffles, grins sheepishly, then writhes in self-abasement as Miss Stanley's unreliable mate; but the part has never been written.

The Playwrights' Company has given "The Traveling Lady" a careful mounting and a capable cast. What it has failed to provide, in any genuine theatrical sense, is a play.